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WILLIAM WATSON AND HIS POETRY.

MR. WATSON has said that he has "lived deep life," that he has "drunk of tragic springs;" but "deep life" and "tragic springs" are not the sources of his poetry. Its sources are such thoughts as are habitual to cultivated people of English race when they seriously discuss State, Church, Literature, or the everyday problems of life. Sometimes, in brooding over the common themes, individual thoughts come to Mr. Watson; but usually it is the better conversation of the day that forms his material. This conversation, condensed to its essentials, and wonderfully clarified, he refashions into verse that is at its average stately rhetoric and at its best sonorous poetry. Only in those rare moments when he is out of hearing of the talk of the time and some large mood of nature dominates him, or when his spirit lifts as he realizes some greatness of his country, or when he is drawn out of himself by the call of old romance, can he attain the magic of high poetry; and even when so dominated or so uplifted or so enchanted he cannot write without echoes of the great poets lingering among his own words. Even in his "Ode to May," where he is most himself, there are suggestions of likeness between lines of his and lines in older poets; and in "The Ode on the Day of Coronation," where the breath of authentic poetry blows about a structure of noble rhetoric raised on stern thought, the reader cannot admire without wondering which modern poet inspired this love of "old forgotten far-off things," who taught him to recapture this "old romance," so familiar is the cry and clang of singing line and sounding line. In these two poems, the best of those not confessedly derivative by choice of subject, Mr. Watson reëchoes others.

Indeed, nothing that he has written is so individual that were it published unsigned it could be surely attributed to him, unless it be his "Apologia," in which he defends himself against the criticism that he writes too much of older poets

and that he brings "naught new." To the former charge he replies that he holds "singers' selves . . . to be very part of nature's greatness," and accounts "their descants not least heroical of deeds." To the latter he replies that he indeed brings "naught new," "save as each noontide or each spring is new." Continuing:

I . . .
. . . can but proffer unto who so will
A cool and no-wise turbid cup, from wells
Our fathers digged; and have not thought it shame
To tread in nobler footsteps than mine own
And travel by the light of purer eyes.

He hopes that his lips do "inherit some far echo" of the "mighty voices of old days:"

It was mine endeavor so to sing
As if these lofty ones a moment stooped
From their still spheres, and undisdainful graced
My note with audience.

So he passes on to a third charge that has been made against his poetry, that it lacks the passion that Milton demands of poetry. He declares:

I too, with constant heart
And with no light or careless ministry,
Have served what seemed the Voice; and unprofane
Have dedicated to melodious ends
All of myself that least ignoble was.

And unto such as think all Art is cold,
All music unimpassioned, if it breathe
An ardor not of Eros' lips, and glow
With fire not caught from Aphrodite's breast,
Be it enough to say that in Man's life
Is room for great emotions unbegot
Of dalliance and embracement, unbegot
Ev'n of the purer nuptials of the soul;
And one not pale of blood, to human touch
Not tardily responsive, yet may know
A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality.

Enough for me, if on these pages fall
The shadow of the summits, and an air
Not dim from human hearth-fires sometimes blow.

It is seldom that a poet has written of his own purpose and

achievement so frankly and so justly. All that he claims with proud humility for his poetry may be granted him, except that his verse is new as "each spring is new." It is a fine retort, that he brings nothing new, "save as each noontide or each spring is new," but it boasts of two widely differing qualities. One noontide recalls another, but each spring refreshes with a joy unknown before. There is one newness of the noontide, a newness that is the rebirth of known and remembered things, and this is Mr. Watson's; there is another newness of the spring, a newness that is the rapture of virgin things, and this is not Mr. Watson's. Mr. Watson surely would not deny that poetry lifts and exhilarates largely through the thrill of first-awakened wonder at thoughts and images, turns of phrase and felicities of sound never met before. These constitute a new note, and a new note struck in poetry is one of the achievements that win for a poet title to greatness. This one possession is sometimes a poet's chief claim to greatness, just as one other supreme gift, style, is Mr. Watson's almost only claim.

All else that Mr. Watson boasts is his, even to the "high lineage" from "the mighty voices of old days." Subjects that have engaged Spenser's attention and Milton's and Wordsworth's and Tennyson's engage his. As these poets were seekers of "order beyond this coil and errancy," so is he. Like them, he is largely concerned with political and social questions, from an outlook basically Puritan. But it is not only of this line of our poets, of natures strenuous yet rigidly controlled, that Mr. Watson may trace descent, but from that line that, beginning in Ben Jonson and continued in Dryden and Pope, has tended toward epigrammatic expression and delighted in rhetoric and satire. The problems that concern the individual as an individual furnish Mr. Watson the material for almost as many poems as do public affairs. He writes of man's relation to God, his place in nature, the why and whither of life; of love of woman; of the great poets; of nature; and most of all, of public affairs.

Public affairs seem to have interested him early. His first published volume, "The Prince's Quest and Other Poems,"

written in great part during his teens, naturally contains no reference to them; but the Soudanese campaign of 1885 and the Russian menace of that year provoked him to a series of fifteen sonnets on public affairs, which he entitles "*Ver Tenebrosum*." From that time until this public affairs have never ceased to inspire him, and in his "*Ode on the Day of Coronation*" of 1902 they have inspired him to his highest poetry of such kind.

As is to be expected of a poet who writes not so often out of possessed mood as on mere happenings or topics of the day, much of Mr. Watson's poetry is occasional. His poetry on public affairs must of necessity be largely occasional. Of such kind are the sonnets of "*Ver Tenebrosum*," "*England to Ireland*," verses praying for reconciliation during the Irish agitation of February, 1888; the sonnets of "*The Year of Shame*," wrung from him in bitterest despair at England's apathetic acquiescence in the Armenian massacres, the various poems of the Boer war, and the "*Ode on the Day of Coronation of King Edward VII.*" The latter poem is not only critical of the events of State of the hour in England but commemorative of England's "old greatnesses" and celebrant of England's imperial sway. In its warning to England that

Already is doom a-spinning, if unstirred
In leisure of ancient pathways she lose touch
Of the hour and overmuch
Recline upon achievement and be slow
To take the world arriving,

it is frankly of the hour that realizes the backwardness of the English army system and of English manufacturing methods. In its reference to old battles and its portrayal of strong rulers, such as,

She a queen, but fashioned kinglike, she
Before whose prowess, before whose tempests, fled
Spain on the ruining night precipitately—

it is commemorative of "old greatnesses," and in its symbolizing of the vastness of the realm that can

Stretch one hand on Huron's bearded pines,
And one on Kashmir's snowy shoulder lay,
And round the streaming of whose raiment shines
The iris of the Australasian spray—

it is celebrant of England's imperial sway. These that I have quoted are not the poem's most beautiful passages. It is in recalling the remote past of England and in following the sunset beyond "Druid Mountains" over the Irish sea that the ode gathers to itself bewildering glamour. No homely Saxon subject can attract magic as Divnaint and "Cumbria sunset-gazing," Morven, "wild Lorn," and Lochiel.

In all there are some sixty of these poems on public affairs. Most of them are critical of English governmental policy, and some of these very personal in their satire. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach and Mr. Alfred Austin are told very plainly of their shortcomings, not by name, of course, but none the less clearly by implication. Mr. Gladstone is appealed to; Mr. Chamberlain and his orchid held up to scorn. Every man can understand, and almost every man outside the influence of party feeling can sympathize, at least theoretically, with Mr. Watson in his indignation at the Armenian massacres, the crushing of Greece by Turkey, and the South African war; but even he himself has by this time realized that most of his poems so inspired, and written at white heat, are not high poetry. It is not that they suffer any taint of political prejudice, but that they are rhetorical rather than poetical. They are effective, but their effectiveness is the effectiveness of rhetoric, not the effectiveness of poetry. The sonnets of "The Year of Shame" (1896) served to carry his name around the world, and one of them, written during the Venezuelan crisis, was deemed important enough as a public document to be cabled to America. Mr. Watson has excluded almost all of these sonnets from his "Collected Poems" of 1898; and it is likely that with his usual good judgment he will exclude most of his verses on the South African war from subsequent editions of his poems. The few poems inspired by the Armenian massacres that he does retain in his "Collected Poems" are the best, and one of them, "Europe at the Play," is an indubitably fine poem. At the same time, it is an admirable illustration of Mr. Watson's methods of finding his material in the talk of the hour. After the

fine opening, in which he tells how Europe, a "languid audience," watches

The last act of the tragedy
On that terrific stage afar,
Where burning towns the footlights are,

he proceeds to say that so sat Rome around the arena in old days, and to prophesy that the fate of the armed empires of modern Europe may be the fate of Rome, a prophecy that scarcely a public speaker or journalist of the Little England party had omitted to state in address after address or in leader after leader.

Yet though Mr. Watson himself adjudges almost all of the poems of "The Year of Shame" ephemeral, and though most of them are ephemeral, that very quality makes them of historical importance in indicating the function of verse in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Of course his protests had no effect, and of course Lord Salisbury's government felicitated itself that neither Mr. Gladstone nor Lord Rosebery had left them so independent a laureate, and of course Mr. Austin answered the protests. It was altogether, maybe, only a pretty pother, but it showed that cultivated people of the English race would still listen to a poet who protested in the name of Christian morality against the despotism of commercial fact. Mr. G. F. Watts testified to his sympathy with the protests by allowing his picture, "The Recording Angel," to be reproduced as frontispiece to "The Year of Shame" (December, 1896), and the Rt. Rev. John Percival, Anglican Bishop of Hereford, prefaced it with a statement, in which he said, "This little volume goes out, as I understand, on the present occasion not only as a poet's impassioned utterance but still more as a patriotic appeal, intended to provoke men to serious thought about national honor and duty; and to move the fountains of charity on behalf of those sufferers who, having endured long agony and sore bereavement and horrors that cannot be plainly described, are now perishing in misery and want amidst all the cruel rigor of an Armenian winter while the Pharaohs of modern Christendom harden their hearts against their bitter cry."

It was a serious effort, at any rate, to use poetry as a means, and it was taken seriously by people the world holds to be in high places; but, as is ever the case when poetry is anything but its own end, it was not high poetry. Nor, as I have said, did it accomplish anything. As Mr. Watson wrote, "the spiritual frost lies so hard upon the land."

The most imposing poem of the class commemorative of England's "old greatnesses" is "The Father of the Forest." Musing by a yew so old that the "stars look youthful," it "being by," the poet broods over the past that the tree must have seen, until there unrolls before him a pageant of that past, beginning with Elizabethan days and extending back to the time when on the down beyond camped "the hosts of Rome." In the pageant pass Cranmer, Mary Queen of Scots, Sir Philip Sidney, Henry V., Edward I., Richard I., the Conqueror, the Viking hordes. When all are gone the poet falls again to brooding, and dreams that the tree whispers to him of a time when the "indomitable world" will have attained that which has for eternities been its goal, "its golden end—Beauty." "A New Year's Prayer" and "Jubilee Night in Westmoreland" are other poems inspired by "the high imperial past." This "high imperial past" he now mourns as dead, the knell of chivalry he has heard rung, but even in that past England was not always righteous. Indeed, in one mood, when he was thinking of the proud boast of Mr. Kipling's prayer, he could declare that though

Best by remembering God, say some,
We keep our high, imperial lot,
Fortune, I fear, hath oftenest come
When we forgot—when we forgot.
A lovelier faith their happier crown,
But history laughs and weeps it down!

His poems celebrant of the British empire's vastness and power are not markedly successful; but here and there in poems of other inspiration he has written "imperial verse" up to his high standards. As far back as 1885, in the last sonnet of "Ver Tenebrosum," he celebrated England's trust in her colonies. A little later he wrote "England and Her Colonies" in the

same strain. In those days, as to-day, he trusted his "Kin before the Muscovite," and declared he was not a cosmopolite, but "chiefly mere Englishman" of "island fostering." He is a lover of his country, but a lover not blind to her failings, who believes that some day she may be "appalled by her own crimson hands;" and yet, although he disapproves of the way in political and in social life of the majority of his countrymen, he naturally enough exclaims:

And whom,
Account so near in natural hands as these
Born of my mother England's mighty womb,
Nursed on my mother England's mighty knees,
And lull'd as I was lull'd in glory and gloom,
With cradle song of her protecting seas?

Born of typically English stock in Wharfedale, Yorkshire, Mr. Watson has lived much on the Lancashire coast of the Irish Sea, in the Lake Country, and in London. In such inheritance and surroundings he grew to manhood with an ever-increasing love of the beautiful in life and nature, and an ever-increasing admiration for the greatness of old times. At maturity he owns a love of order and law in all things, a reliance on precedent and authority, a veneration for those institutions that have survived out of England's past. He once declared he loved

So well man's noble memories
He needs must love man's nobler hopes yet more.

Yet as he grows older his temperamental conservatism grows on him, though even his concurrently growing pessimism does not dissuade him from Liberal tendencies. Closely grafted on this Liberal Conservatism is an aristocratic creed. This creed well accords with the manner of his poetry, which has always a high-bred air and pace. An idealist such a man must be; life for him must be a life chosen from many possible ways of living—life sublimed—and life must have style. With these things in conjunction realism has not to do. He does once declare "Life as I see it lived is great enough for me;" but the life that he wills to see, though it inspire him to pessimism, is such life as I have indicated, above all a life concerned with

great issues. Tragedy to him is not merely the triumph of the universal over the individual; it is "the overthrow of something great." He makes one or two perfunctory references to the plight of Demos, but he quotes with something of their author's scorn the Miltonic phrases "the nameless aggregated millions" who "grow up and perish as the summer fly." Not that Mr. Watson is unsympathetic—no one could accuse the writer of "The Year of Shame" and "For England" of lack of sympathy—but he feels keenly distinctions between men, between things. "The sense of oneness with our kind" he puts on record as one of "the things that are most excellent." Others are "the thirst to know and understand," "a large and liberal discontent."

The grace of friendship, mind and heart
Linked with their fellow-heart and mind
The gains of science, gifts of art.

How much friendship is to him he reveals in the number of his poems that are addressed to people. Of these some are occasional poems of compliment, in which the compliment terminates a lyric that has led to it gracefully. In this form he is particularly happy—witness the poems "To Richard Holt Hutton" and "To Lady Katherine Manners." Others are epistles in the eighteenth century manner, combining personal references with disquisition upon some contemporary problem, such as the ode "To Arthur Christopher Benson." Others still are almost solely critical of poetry, such as that "To Edward Dowden;" and yet others almost solely personal to the man addressed, as that "To Edward Clodd." This insistence on the social side of letters is of a part with Mr. Watson's interest in recording social discussion of all kinds, and is one of several proclivities of his that ally him to the eighteenth century writers. Most modern poets feel that the delights of social life cannot well be transmitted into poetry. Mr. Watson makes Dr. Johnson say that "your modern poet would appear to be a taciturn and unsocial person who never opens his mouth until he comes where there are none but ravens and sea mews to listen;" and in the same essay, "Dr. Johnson on

Modern Poetry : an Interview in the Elysian Fields," Mr. Watson, as interviewer, admits to the Doctor "that in the failure to give classical literary form to the presentation of social life is the vulnerable side of modern poetry." Mr. Watson has given "classical literary form to the presentation" of the better conversational topics of social life, and in so far strengthens the defenses on this side of modern poetry; further he has not gone, and wisely, for it is indeed a hard and high endeavor.

Although in the eighteenth century sense of the word a "philosophic" poet, being more concerned with the constitution of things than with the appearance of things, Mr. Watson has nowhere laid down definitely his philosophy of life, as he has in the "Apologia" definitely laid down the purpose of his art. His attitude must be learned from a declaration here and a declaration there; in "The Hope of the World," more fully than elsewhere, he states such philosophy as he has formulated. Law and love he would see the rulers of the world, he would have man live by them; man, who as far as he can judge, did not rise to his kingship through some purpose of nature's, but climbed there by chance. If so it be, what assurance is there that he will ever rise to more than mortal state, that he will put on immortality? There is no such assurance, he admits. "Equal, my source of hope, my reason for despair." Although he hopes, he will no longer on this world

Cast ignoble slight
Counting it but the door
Of other worlds more bright.

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Who know not whence I am sped, nor to what port I sail.

Almost always when Mr. Watson is concerned with life he is concerned too with religion. Always seeking peace, he never finds it, but joy and sorrow instead. Here in this world are good and bad; when he is in contemplative mood, more bad; in his rare exultant moods, more good. In such moods he can believe

That heaven, the ocean, gains on earth, the shore;
And that deformity and hate are Time's,
And love and loveliness Eternity's.

The past he knows had in it some good, therefore his eyes turn always lovingly on the past; there he sees the "burly oak," in the present only "the lissom willow swaying to the wind." Altogether it is not too cheerful a philosophy he professes, but one that holds to high ideals. If he does not always hold to Church and State, he does to the foundations of morality and religion, of law and order, on which Church and State are based; he holds to the institutions of his race.

Of the problems of life outside the domain of politics Mr. Watson has written some hundred poems, of which about twenty-five may be denominated love poetry. The constitution of things, the laws of nature, the question of immortality, the incidents of social life, occupy him as often as does love; yet of love songs he is a skillful maker, and his verse has never so much lilt as here. His first poem is naturally enough a poem of love. "The Prince's Quest" is a quest for love, a development of a theme not unlike that of William Morris's "Love Is Enough." "Angelo," a tragedy, and a few lyrics of this volume of 1880 are also love poetry. Not a poem in the volume is retained in his "Collected Works" of 1898, and rightly; for the lyrics are only clever, and the narrations of "The Prince's Quest" and "Angelo" are juvenile and of a form which Mr. Watson has never mastered. "Domine, Quo Vadis," "The Saint and the Satyr," and "The Ballad of the Britain's Pride" are his other narratives, and none of them is of importance.

Mr. Watson has spoken rather derogatively of the "ardor of Eros' lips," and he has kept it from his own. His love verse is written out of the reverie of love, a reverie undisturbed by the tumult of passion. In such reverie he can dream:

Thy voice from inmost dreamland calls,
 The wastes of sleep thou makest fair;
 Bright o'er the ridge of darkness falls
 The cataract of thy hair.
 The morn renews its golden birth;
 Thou with the vanquished night dost fade;
 And leav'st the ponderable earth
 Less real than thy shade.

"Lux Perdita" and "Too Late" are gravely introspective in thought and marmoreally beautiful in style. "The Lure" and

"A Golden Hour" are exquisite as their titles, and "The Heights and the Deeps," with its Cumbrian setting and its simplicity and freshness and deep-heartedness, carries one back to Wordsworth. These I have mentioned win me most of Mr. Watson's love poems, and I care not at all that he does not sound the deeps of passion. Curiously illustrative of his avoidance of certain kinds of love poetry is his omission from "Lyric Love; an Anthology" of any poem of Browning's or Mr. Swinburne's.

Admirer of Wordsworth that he is, Mr. Watson has written comparatively little verse descriptive of Nature, and that little is not Wordsworthian. In "The Heights and the Deeps" he comes nearest to Wordsworth's way and tone. Even in "Wordsworth's Grave," where he might well have pictured the graveyard in Grasmere vale with the mountains brooding above, he mentions, until the very close of the poem, scarcely a detail save "the old rude church, with bare, bald tower," and the "cool murmur" of Rotha lulling the poet's rest. The note of the poem is peace, the peace it distinguishes as Wordsworth's message, the peace that is Grasmere's; and in his wish to give this peace, Mr. Watson does in some part describe twilight in the vale, "the sheen of the retreating day" behind Helm Crag and Silver Howe, the half-heard bleat of sheep coming from the hill pastures. In many other poems, as in this, there are references to nature; but neither here nor in the dozen poems that may be called nature poems are there any revelations of an intimate delight such as was Wordsworth's. Although the Cumberland Mountains are in sight of Southport, Mr. Watson tells us that in boyhood he dwelt only "where Nature but prattled familiar language;" then he visited Lakeland, whose beauty touched his "youth with bloom, tender and magical light," where Nature spoke to his "spirit in lofty and resonant numbers." "Lakeland once more" is an eloquent tribute to Cumbria. There have been his, he writes, "friendships and hates," "love and a whisper of fame;"

But ever to you I return, O land in the dusk of whose portals
Rustles my Past like leaves, memories brush me as wings.

"Night on Curbar Edge," "An Inscription at Windermere," "An Epistle to N. A.," "A Riddle of the Thames," "The First Skylark of Spring," "April," "Autumn," "Hymn to the Sea," and "Ode in May" about complete the list of his nature poems, and scarcely one of these is purely descriptive. "April" is one of his most spontaneous lyrics, musical as with rain among the leaves. "Autumn," harking back inevitably to Keats, is fashioned of marble, but warmed to something of the mellowness of the season it describes by the breath of romance so rare a visitant to his poetry; the "Hymn to the Sea," a gallant attempt to do the impossible, is, despite its sounding elegiacs, hardly as rapturous as the spring and the sea whose pæan it raises; the "Ode to May" is the most exultant of Mr. Watson's poems, where for once he awakes to an appreciation of the "glorious energy of things," and captures and imprisons that energy in his verse as he failed to capture and imprison in his hymn, "the thunderous throbs of life divine," in which "leaped the glad sea."

The details of out-of-door life that so interested Wordsworth, and that so interested Mr. Watson's fellow-Wordsworthian, Mr. A. C. Benson, have apparently little charm for him. Perhaps he does not know much about birds or flowers, country ways or the signs of the seasons. Even the larger manifestations of nature seldom find place in his writing. "The authentic mountain thrill" no more shakes his page than it does Arnold's. I do not regret that Mr. Watson has not written of Nature, I merely remark it is a curious phenomenon in a poet who holds Wordsworth as master. That he could write nobly if not intimately of these things is proved by these lines from "A Child's Hair:"

And over piny tracts of Vaud
The rose of eve steals up the snow;
And on the waters far below
Strange sails like wings
Half bodilessly come and go,
Fantastic things;

And tender night falls like a sigh
On chalet low and chateau high;

And the far cataract's voice comes nigh,
Where no man hears;
And spectral peaks impale the sky
On silver spears.

Mr. Watson made his appeal to the world with a critical elegy, "Wordsworth's Grave," in 1890; but in his "Epigrams of Life, Art, and Nature," of 1884, he had already written metrical critiques. "Lachrymae Musarum" and "Lyric Love" were published in 1892, and the next year the prose "Excursions in Criticism" followed. Many notable critical-elegiac poems are included in his later volumes. All the poets he criticises are of well-established fame, and the criticisms in little he makes are not flashes of insight that for the first time penetrate the mystery of the poet's charm and for the first time reveal him to the world, but accurate condensations in most pregnant and felicitous verse of the opinion of the "hoi episkopoi" of our time in regard to that poet. Thus when he writes of Shelley as "the cloud-begot," as a man of "vain vision," who rides in "thin ether," "lost in a storm of light," no one who knows Arnold's essay but will recall "the beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain."

"Lyric Love," his anthology of English love poetry, makes it evident that Mr. Watson is not trustworthy as a critic when he goes outside the poets commonly known. His selections from the Rev. Mr. Butler, Mr. Pollock (is he now Sir Walter Herries Pollock?) and Mr. Austin are unworthy of place, and some of Mr. Swinburne's lyrics, as well as some of Browning's, should have been given. It is, of course, possible that copyright prevented their inclusion. Mr. Watson does not pick out the best among his contemporaries, and when he turns to the lesser men among the Georgians he makes selections that will not stand the test of comparison with those of the best anthologies. Even notable poems of Mr. Meredith and Tennyson and Wordsworth are left out; but all that he quotes from these poets are notable, and I would not make the error of objecting simply because I do not find some personal favorites. From the eighteenth century he could, and did take,

but little. He quotes very freely from the seventeenth century, laying it down as his belief that the Elizabethan lyrists are greatly overpraised, as in "Some Literary Idolatries" he maintains Dekker, Webster, Tourneur, and Ford are overpraised. Surely a man is not fanatic in his admiration of the Elizabethan lyric because he complains of the inclusion of but one lyric of Campion's and of the entire omission of Lodge, Barnefield, and Donne.

In his essay, "Some Literary Idolatries," in arguing that Webster and Poe are not poets of the first rank, Mr. Watson says very plainly what he considers the qualities of greatness in poetry: "But the authentic masters, are they not masters in virtue of their power of nobly elucidating the difficult world, not of exhibiting it in a fantastic lime light? And after all, the highest beauty in art is, perhaps, transcendent propriety. The touches which allure us by strangeness, or which 'surprise by a fine excess' belong at best to the second order of greatness. The highest, rarest, and most marvelous of all are those which simply compel us to feel they are supremely fit and right." "A transcendent propriety" in art seems to Mr. Watson to exclude strangeness and excess, and yet strangeness and excess are the very being of romantic art. Mr. Watson is obviously a classicist, but there are few classicists that would lay down such a dictum. Romance has had a noble revenge on him in lifting his loftiest passages with its breath. It is romance that calls from "inmost dreamland," that cries "Lost about Lochiel," that stirs "the million-lilied stream of night."

"Wordsworth's Grave," the first of Mr. Watson's important critical elegies, remains his most important. Written thirty-five years after Wordsworth's death, it is not in any sense a lament for the poet personally; it is rather a lament for our own age that lacks so great a voice. It is composed of seven parts, that might each, with slight alterations, be printed as a separate poem. There are in all forty-seven stanzas of four lines each. Part I. celebrates Wordsworth's grave itself, beside Rotha, in the shadow of the "old rude church" at Grasmere, and the power in his poetry that calls our age back to

Wordsworth. Part II. postulates that Wordsworth's great gift was the gift of peace, "peace, whose names are rapture, power, clear sight, and love;" and compares this gift with Milton's keen, translunar music," with "Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless human view," with Shelley's "flush of rose on peaks divine," with Coleridge's "wizard twilight," with Byron's "tempest anger, tempest mirth." Part III. analyzes Wordsworth more minutely, insisting that his song was impassioned and ecstatic. Part IV. outlines in fourteen stanzas the history of poetry in the eighteenth century up to the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads" in 1798. Pope and his school, Collins's "lonely vesper chime," Gray's "frugal note," Blair, Goldsmith, Burns with his "plowman's conquering share," are criticised in succession until "Those morning stars that sang together rose," the dreamer and the seer, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Part V. sketches the progress of poetry down through the Victorians—from Mr. Swinburne, whose "empty music floods the ear," and Browning, who "the heart refreshing tires the brain," to the "loquacious throng" that "flutter and twitter," for so Mr. Watson sees the minor poets of the eighties. Part VI. contrasts Byron with "hot heart world-defiled," and Wordsworth, who was home, who was all but nature's voice. Part VII. returns to the grave at Grasmere. The poem ends on the note on which it began, the note of rest and peace.

Rest! 'Twas the gift he gave; and peace! the shade
He spread, for spirits fevered with the sun.
To him his bounties are come back—here laid
In rest, in peace, his labor nobly done.

"*Lachrymae Musarum*," a threnody for Tennyson, was published immediately upon his death in October, 1892. It is only incidentally critical, as when Mr. Watson remarks of Tennyson's "honeyed words," that they are "rich with sweets from every muse's hive." Mr. Watson employs various forms for elegiac poems. "Wordsworth's Grave" is written in the measure of Gray's *Elegy*, "*Lachrymae Musarum*" is an irregular ode, and "Shelley's Centenary," "In Laleham Churchyard," and "The Tomb of Burns" are in the six-line stanza in which

Wordsworth wrote "At the Grave of Burns," and in which Burns wrote so many of his epistles. Of Matthew Arnold, a follower of ideals not unlike those Mr. Watson now follows, and like him an admirable critical poet, he writes with much sympathy, but with keenness. Mr. Watson judges it best that Arnold sleeps where he was born, at Laleham on Thames, rather than where he spent many vacations, on Rotha above Ambleside.

'Tis fittest thus! for though with skill
He sang of beck and tarn and ghyll,
The deep, authentic mountain thrill
Ne'er shook his page!
Somewhat of worldling lingered still
With bard and sage.

Thus succinctly he puts the accomplishment of Burns:

No mystic torch through Time he bore,
No virgin veil from life he tore;
His soul no bright insignia wore
Of starry birth;
He saw what all men see—no more—
In heaven and earth.

But as, when thunder crashes nigh,
All darkness opes one flaming eye,
And this world leaps against the sky—
So fiery-clear
Did the old truths that we pass by
To him appear.

And "on his lips the eternal themes again were new." These fragments I break out indicate the quality of the criticism, but not its form of development. It begins by placing Burns beside the masters of English poetry, then explains his historical position, then states his dominant accomplishment, following out that accomplishment somewhat carefully, and closing with the prophecy of perennial life for his songs.

These that I have mentioned are the critical elegies. The critiques in fly leaf poems, epistles, and other occasional poems are many. In a poem addressed "To Edward Dowden, on Receiving from Him a Copy of the Life of Shelley," Mr. Watson tells us of his own poetical development from a captive to Shelley's power to a captive to Keats's, to a freeman of Wordsworth's. Here again is true and well-put criticism of

Shelley. Landor Mr. Watson hits off in a line: "The bland Attic skies True mirrored in an English well." An epigram written on Longfellow's death, in 1882, shows Mr. Watson's power of condensed criticism was developed at a comparatively early age. He has written, too, poems in criticism of Coleridge, Lamb, Aubrey De Vere, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Austin Dobson. Besides poems devoted to these above-mentioned poets, he often puts in a line for purposes of comparison or illustration, his opinion of other poets. Milton is referred to as "The starriest voice that e'er on English ears hath rung." Sir Philip Sidney is "the perfect knight,"

The soldier, courtier, bard, in one,
Sidney, that pensive Hester-light,
O'er Chivalry's departed sun.

Keats is represented as

To Grecian gods allied,
Clasping all beauty as his bride.

I have dwelt some time on these critical poems of Mr. Watson because I believe it is of this kind he is absolute master. He has perhaps in lines and passages and short lyrics elsewhere written higher poetry, but in no other form of verse is he so uniformly at high level as here.

Of his own art and of his own accomplishment in it Mr. Watson has written much and written well. As I have said, he himself confesses that, beginning as a disciple of Shelley, he transferred his allegiance to Keats, and that then Wordsworth sang him free. These are not the only poets that have influenced him. I cannot read a page of "The Prince's Quest" without noting several lines at least that are in William Morris's manner. Mr. Lane says that Rossetti denied Mr. Watson's following of Morris, maintaining that he went straight back to Keats. Let the reader compare "The Prince's Quest" and "Love Is Enough" and decide for himself. "Epigrams of Life, Art, and Nature" followed four years after "The Prince's Quest" in 1884, and marked a decided advance upon it. Mr. Watson had used the decasyllabic rhymed couplet in "The Prince's Quest," and in it cast some effective lines; but it had there none of the antithetical quality of the Popean couplet

which it has in those epigrams in which it is used, epigrams consisting of two couplets. In "Wordsworth's Grave," which was written during 1884-87 although not published till 1890, Mr. Watson attained mastery of his craft of verse-making. Since then he has always written with absolute command of his material. His experience of life has inevitably deepened, but there is little evidence of such deepening in his poetry. There is no more magic, no more lyric cry in his poetry written to-day than in that written sixteen years ago, nor would any one expect more; one might expect less magic and cry, but there is no less of either in "The Ode on the Day of Coronation" than in "Wordsworth's Grave;" nor is there a larger accent, which might be looked for. His powers have maintained themselves steadily at a high level from his thirtieth to his forty-sixth year without any sign of aging. His tone is not less serene. It was never tumultuous, for Mr. Watson, pen once in hand, was always middle-aged. In 1892 there was enough demand for his poems to warrant his collecting them, and when Tennyson died Mr. Watson was prominently mentioned for the laureateship. His "Lachrymae Musarum" was published late this year (1892), a poem up to the high level of his earlier work. "The Eloping Angels" of 1893 is possibly a satire, but, whatever it is, inconsequential. Mr. Watson has wisely omitted it from his "Collected Poems" of 1898. He added "Lachrymae Musarum" to his "Poems" in 1893. The "Odes" of 1894 substantiated Mr. Watson's position by adding to the bulk of his work. "The Purple East" of 1895 was included in "The Year of Shame" of 1896. These sonnets increased respect for Mr. Watson as man but not as poet. "The Father of the Forest" of 1895 is a very thin volume, but it is memorable as containing his "Apologia," "The Tomb of Burns," and "Hymn to the Sea." Late in 1897 "The Hope of the World" was published; the title poem, like the title poem of the previous volume, was another attempt of Mr. Watson's to write a long poem bodying forth an important conception, but like it, and like most of his longer poems after "Wordsworth's Grave," it is diffuse and rather wandering. In 1898 came the "Collected Poems," proving Mr.

Watson, on the whole, a good judge of his own abilities; then, with the exception of some few indignant and sorrowful poems on the South African War, silence until 1902, when Mr. Watson published his "Ode on the Day of Coronation," his first long poem since "Wordsworth's Grave" in which he had grip of his subject and architectonic power to shape and hold the whole together. In 1903 he collected these few poems on the Boer War, calling the collection "For England." Fine lines may be found among the lines of any of them; but though these lines may be memorable, the body of the verses are only of the hour.

I have said that it is by their style that Mr. Watson's poems gain the claim they have to distinction. Style almost never deserts him; it distinguishes even those poems of his that verge on society verse and the sermon. He has chosen in style a solid rock on which to rear his castles in the air. Listen how sure he is of his foundations! "There can be no doubt that Style is the greatest antiseptic in literature, the most powerful preservative against decay." . . . "The truth is Style is high breeding." . . . "It does not necessarily imply transcendent beauty. . . . What we do imply when we speak of a horse or a woman or a poem, as having Style, is a certain crowning attitude which we recognize instinctively as the result and sum of various essentially aristocratic qualities which fuse in perfect harmony and rhythm. Serenity—by which I do not for a moment mean languor or apathy, but serenity based upon strength—is one of these qualities. A certain touch of hauteur is perhaps inseparable from Style in its most impressive manifestations. . . . Thus frankly democratic poets like Burns are without Style, properly so called. One of the characteristics of that order of poets is absence of reserve, whereas we have a feeling that Style always holds something back, never quite lets itself go. Probably passion plus self-restraint is the moral basis of the finest Style." Indignation, brevity, simplicity, Mr. Watson says, make for Style; "its very life and soul are its remoteness from the vulgar, the plebeian, its inalienable aristocracy of birth and breeding. . . . I cannot help reverting yet once more to Milton because he best proves the truth that in poetry Style is

the paramount and invincible force. What else is the secret of his supremacy among our poets—a supremacy which no poet can doubt, and no true critic of poetry?" Again I must exclaim, curious statements for a Wordsworthian when the master has lain down the law that the diction of poetry should be chosen from the everyday speech of peasants! Curious statements for the man that has said elsewhere that "cardinal emotions and elementary states of feeling . . . are the primary stuff of lyric poetry," for a man that has written, "There is, perhaps, nothing in literature comparable to the pure elemental lyrism of Burns's finest songs." Curious statements, but reconcilable to these latterly quoted passages, had their author kept clear in mind the old rhetorical distinction between Style and Invention. The humblest subjects may be lifted to remote heights by Style. Mr. Watson has written elsewhere of "a lofty song of lowly weal and dole," and that, plucked by the poet's hand,

The basest weed that grows
Towers to a lily, reddens to a rose.

This Style may or may not be aristocratic. Inevitability, as of nature's magical ways, is more the secret of Style than is aristocracy. No one would say that Wordsworth's "Daffodils" was aristocratic, and yet it is admitted the highest poetry. But Mr. Watson's basic statement that "Style is the greatest antiseptic in literature" is unmistakably just, as are his statements that "cardinal emotions and elementary states of feeling" are "the primary stuff of lyric poetry." Had his poetry in it more of these, it would be greater, and could be greater would he write of these things, rising from them to higher.

But through all life and death and birth,
Earth and the waters 'neath the earth,
Are Song's domain;
Nor aught so lowly but is worth
The loftiest strain, . . .

'Tis from these moods in which Life stands
With feet earth-planted, yet with hands
Stretched toward visionary lands
Where vapours lift

A moment, and aërial strands
Gleam through the rift.

The poet wins, in hours benign,
An older than the Delphic Shrine,
Those intimations faint and fine,
To which belongs
Whatever character divine
Invest his songs.

Like Tennyson, who frankly boasted that Style was his, but as frankly admitted that subjects to write on did not come to him easily, Mr. Watson admits his "muse a fitful presence seldom tarrying long." In "Invention" he hails creation the supreme rapture, but creation is not to him the work of one inspired mood. A careful and unrelenting workman, he changes his verses if he thinks he can better them. He generally does better them, almost always betters their form, although sometimes in so doing he omits some phrase that drove his meaning home. Fine as the "Ode in May" was when he sent it to the press from Southport, it is finer in the corrected and lengthened version that appeared in "The Hope of the World." He is hardly exact, then, in calling himself a minstrel "who finds, not fashions his numbers."

I have quoted from a number of poems in which Mr. Watson writes of poetry. Some of these are devoted to poetry alone, others mention it only by the way, but almost his every mention of it is felicitous. How high his ideal, how hard his striving to reach it is indicated in those extracts. Art, he says, brings travail and work, but keeps no record of them. Certainly in his verse as he gives it to the world there is no evidence of toil, there is "on the summits repose." No thought of his is ever obscured, although its emphasis may be lessened by a sacrifice to exigencies of verse, his form is always what he would have it; yet he is not content with these perfections. He knows "The Sovereign Poet" has more than these:

The glorious riddle of his rhythmic breath,
His might, his spell, we know not what they be:
We only feel, whate'er he uttereth,
This savours not of death,
This hath a relish of eternity.

It is in single lines and short passages of Mr. Watson's that I note "a relish of eternity." Like Pope, to whom he owes much, and from whose poems he has culled a list of fine lines that must surprise an age that holds "disease and death's irreparable doom" to be Pope's sole contribution to poetry, Mr. Watson is most memorable in single lines and brief passages. Some of them are of rhetorical, others of poetical excellence; and these quotations must substantiate, I think, my feeling that by temperament, if not by training, Mr. Watson is nearer to the eighteenth century writers than any of our contemporary poets. Such lines as these seem to me better proof of this kinship than his preference for the decasyllabic couplet: "They see not clearliest who see all things clear;" "Powerless potentates and foolish sages Impede the slow steps of the pompous ages;" "The sense of greatness keeps a nation great;" "The dullness of entire felicity;" "A devil of exceeding rich resource;" "His trick of doing nothing with an air;" "Came over with the Conqueror type of mind." These, it seems to me, are mainly rhetorical in their appeal. Those that follow mainly poetical: "Magnificent out of the dust we came; And abject from the Spheres," "Fiercely sweet as stormy springs, Mighty hopes are blowing wide." "Youth irrepressibly fair wakes like a wondering rose;" "The high imperial Past is dead;" "And ever more the deepest words of God Are yet the easiest to understand;" "A lofty song of lowly weal and dole." Most of these lines are taken from his decasyllabic rhymed couplets; but others are from his blank verse, sonnets, elegiacs, and the various lyric forms in which he writes.

I have spoken of the clarity of his verse, its stateliness, its compressedness, its sonorousness, its infrequent magic, its infrequent inbreathings of romance. It has harmony too, less often melody. There are seldom passages that make me pause and say, "What this means I don't know and don't care, for it is beautiful;" but here is one not very nearly applicable, yet beautiful:

The South shall bless, the East shall blight,
The red rose of the Dawn shall blow;
The million-lilied stream of Night
Wide in ethereal meadows flow.

Mr. Watson, for all his imitateness, seldom attempts to capture the highest notes of English poetry. Yet he captures high notes from many masters. He can borrow from the Poe he depreciates

In his immemorial fastnesses
At night's aboriginal core—

and he speaks with Tennyson's accents when he writes of "Gardens of odorous bloom and tremulous fruit." Once, too, he has reflected the light that glitters through

Magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn—

warming it, as he imprisons it in words, with radiance caught from Wordsworth's clear morning glow. He is writing of Keats when he attains to

Magic as of morn,
Bursting forever newly born
On forests old,
Waking a hoary world forlorn
With touch of gold.

Many more of his memorable passages are, like these, virtual paraphrases of great sayings familiar to us in the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, and Arnold. His work presents somewhat the same phenomenon as that of the Miltonic school of the eighteenth century, that used Milton's diction on subjects approved by Pope. Pope's greatest line reappears in Mr. Watson in "The irreparable day and final doom;" "a divine discontent" becomes "a large and liberal discontent," and echoes all are these: "Mighty from Milton's pen and Cromwell's sword," "Not to bring peace Mine errand, but a sword," "For waters have connived at our designs, And winds have plotted with us," "There is, O grave, thy hourly victory, And there, O death, thy sting." Like the eighteenth century poets, he is again in his habit of calling a river "a wave," the Mediterranean "the southern foam;" in his predilection to critical and occasional and didactic verse, in his usual repression of exultant passion, in his narrow range of vision.

It is here that his limitations are most manifest. It is not

that, as Wordsworth accused the eighteenth century, Mr. Watson does not write with eye on the object—you feel he sees it; but that he does not receive an individual impression from it, that he takes impressions of some one that saw and noted it before, that perhaps his reflection upon it is his own, but that oftenest his opinion too is the opinion of some other. He may go alone with his Muse by the sea or among the mountains, but the memory of what sea and mountains have said to others deafens his ears. She may be, as he says, “hill-cradled and baptized with brine;” but the hill winds have not reached her heart, they cannot even flutter the stiff brocades with which she is robed, in which she moves with inviolate patrician grace; in her heart is no tumult of the sea, though its majesty is still a rumor there. Yet she has kept her vow, as Mr. Watson proudly boasts, “that she would dwell with greatest things,” and if she has not really known “the mountain spell,” “the sky enchantment,” there are other “greatest things” than these.

Of great poets often, of “the high imperial past” of England less often, of nature and of dream-laden romance now and then, Mr. Watson has written with style but short of great. And to do these things is no little thing.

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